BALLANCHE AND SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY

BY

RUBY ROXANE LEES

A.B., University of Illinois, 1942
A.M., University of Illinois, 1943

AN ABSTRACT OF A THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN
FRENCH IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF
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Pierre-Simon Ballanche, a member of Mme. Récamier's salon at the Abbaye-aux-Bois in Paris, knew during his lifetime a certain literary success, although his works did not possess the artistic qualities necessary to perpetuate them. The general public of nineteenth-century France had not considered him as one of their most popular writers. Since he preferred to publish only a few copies of his works for intimate friends, most people remained in ignorance of his merit as a writer until 1830, when his friends persuaded him to publish a four-volume edition of his writings. Even then only those who knew him well placed him among top-ranking philosophers. It is the purpose of this study to show that Ballanche was a precursor of the Catholic renascence in France through his conception of social Christianity.

The term, social Christianity, is not to be found in any of Ballanche's writings. In fact, it did not come into general use until the 1850's in England and was not accepted by the French Academy until 1878. In no critical discussion on Ballanche and his ideas is one able to find a concise definition of social Christianity. The definition upon which this study is based is as follows: social Christianity is active, Christian humanitarianism. It is the practical application of Christian doctrines, ideas, and beliefs in society.

Ballanche's concept was not formed during a single period of his life nor stated completely in any single work. It was a cumulative idea which expanded as he encountered various social and political problems of his day. Personal experiences and suffering had much to do with the formulation of his concepts. Part I of this study introduces Ballanche and his personal background, for it is only through a knowledge of the man and his character that one is able to understand fully the evolution and application of his philosophy.

Part II is a complete discussion of the writings of Ballanche in relation to his Christian philosophy. At first steeped in the traditions of the ancients and the classicists, Ballanche saw in the myths of antiquity certain principles of Christianity. Contemporary turmoil, however, drew Ballanche's focus of interest from classical myths to the society of early nineteenth-century France. With his inherent qualities of philosopher and conciliator, he sought to express his ideas through his works which he read to the intimate circle of the Abbaye-aux-Bois. The amplitude of his thought encompassed and united traditional and progressive ideas. Through this union he achieved the conception of active charity as the basis for society and for the unity of all mankind. It will be noted that in his expression of social Christianity is to be found the germ of three

ideas which were to have a considerable place in the thought and literature of the nineteenth century: the philosophy of myths, the philosophy of history, and liberal Catholicism.

The third part of this study indicates Ballanche's position in relation to his period. It is important to note his personal relations which centered in and around Mme. Récamier's circle. Among the literary figures to be found in this group were Chateaubriand, Mme. de Staël, Benjamin Constant, and Lamennais. In order to give a more comprehensive picture of Ballanche's place in his period, it will be necessary to consider him also in relation to the main social movements of nineteenth-century France. In this way, the significance and trend of social Christianity, as first expressed by Ballanche, become evident.

I. Background

The main events of Ballanche's life, reconstructed from the written testimony of his contemporaries, give an insight into the conditions which contributed to the formation and development of his social and religious ideas. These events are worth knowing, for only through an intimate knowledge of the man Ballanche are the expressed ideas of the Christian philosopher Ballanche clear in meaning. He was born August 6, 1776, in Lyon. As a child, he was subjected to the suffering and upheaval caused by the Revolution of 1789. The impression made upon his sensitive spirit was indelible, and even his earliest writings indicate his longing to offer to his country some system which would forestall future social and political disturbances.

As his father's associate in the printing business, Ballanche developed his literary tendencies. He came into contact with Chateaubriand, who came to Lyon to arrange all the business transactions necessary for the publishing, by the Ballanche printers, of several of his works. With his more intimate friends, such as Charles Fourier, André-Marie Ampère, and Camille Jordan, Ballanche formed a small literary society; the Lyon Academy invited him to become their historiographer. If these groups had no other influence, they at least encouraged his talent.

In 1812 Ballanche met Mme. Récamier, who was to be his Beatrice. Their friendship, which quickly developed, was to become a living inspiration for his literary endeavors. After his father's death in October, 1816, Ballanche was able to move to Paris, where he became a member of the group at the Abbaye-aux-Bois. Until this time, the Lyon printer and writer had not found the philosophic formula which he wanted to follow. The Restoration had a decisive influence on men of such activities and intelligence as Ballanche. It marked, for him especially, the beginning of

a new era, since he thought his ideal of a liberal royalism at the same time favorable to the progress of civilization and to the welfare of society, had come. In the verbal battles and discussions during the Restoration, the necessity of founding the institutions of France upon an alliance of past and present societies had become for Ballanche a sort of religious conviction. He listened to the prophets of the past and of the future. From the former he took their respect for tradition and from the others he received their cult of progess. For this conciliatory task, he sought support from the only force which he thought had remained stable during the years of political and social conflict — the Catholic Church. As interpreter of the social and religious renovation, he reasserted the dogmas of the Catholic religion. This religion, whose dogmas were fixed in the past, was for him still a new religion since it was capable of admitting, developing, and directing the progress of all modern ideas. The essential purpose of Ballanche was to re-establish Christianity in its function as a universal force, both in the domain of society and in the domain of literature. In Ballanche, France had found a new type of political and social writer.

In recognition of his contemporary reputation among the leaders of thought, Ballanche was elected a member of the French Academy in 1842. His speech of acceptance was his last literary endeavor, for general ill health and a nervous disorder had aged him considerably. He died June 12, 1847. With the deepest respect, Alexis de Tocqueville pronounced the eulogy in memory of a writer whose works had served the sacred cause of humanity.

II. Literary Works of Ballanche

The Lyon philosopher began the exposition of his theory of social Christianity by insisting that society can not exist without religion. He disclosed his ideas on this subject in the *Essai sur les institutions sociales dans leurs rapports avec les idées nouvelles* (1816) and in *Le Vieillard et le jeune homme* (1819). It was Ballanche's purpose to prove that moral feeling was not weakened and society was not divorced from religious ideas. Humanity had come to a new era which would make evident all the consequences of moral, social, and humanitarian principles that were constantly present in the world. According to Ballanche's theory, man did not possess a social instinct which caused him to seek the companionship of his fellow men. Rather, God imposed society upon man as a test. Life in society, therefore, was a sort of initiation which served to manifest the moral and intellectual being of man. Such a society was the only place in which man could develop his faculties. Ballanche argued that the dogmas of a social religion had to become the basis for the direction of

society; only through them would there be unity of humanity which is conducive to harmonious social progress.

Ballanche conceived the project of exposing the plan of the social progress of humanity. Accordingly, he turned to the past to substantiate his ideas for the present and the future. By use of symbols he managed to prophesy the renovation of humanity if it relied on Christianity, the only existing force by which the regeneration of France and even Europe could be brought about. In *Antigone* (1814) he showed how the mysteries of Christianity were foreshadowed in the myths and traditions of the primitive world. Oedipe, as a symbol of all human destinies, exemplified the principles of expiation and redemption, while the entire myth of *Antigone* was a story of the submissiveness of a miserable humanity to superior decrees. In antiquity these principles were attributed to Fate. This concept of fate had to pass through many transformations before it was recognized as Providence governing the world in accord with individual liberty. Ballanche wanted not only to indicate the Christian principles of man's expiation and subsequent redemption, but also to show how man used these principles in order to progress. The purpose of the *Palingénésie sociale* (1829) was to disclose all important aspects of the regeneration of society brought about by man's gradual awareness of the beginnings of religious and social principles. The myth *Orphée* (1829) disclosed the beginnings of man's progression from a barbarian to a civilized and rehabilitated being. Here were the first efforts made by humanity to acquire responsibility, possession of conscience, and emancipation of action. Through the teachings of Orphée, man learned to form an advanced and unified social state. As the idea that all men were united grew, the plebeian no longer saw any reason for being subjected by the patrician to a state of virtual nonexistence. Whereas *La Formule générale* (1829) showed the gradual plebeian acquisition of personal liberty, the abolition of the complete identification of the client with the patron, *Virginie et le Mont-Sacré* (1831) developed the idea of civil liberty. *La Vision d'Hébal* (1831) continued to reveal further steps involved in this virtual rebirth of society. The evolution of plebeianism represented the evolution of humanity itself, whose last step of emancipation was the true religion of humanity, Christianity. Whereas the patricians of former periods had acted as "initiateurs" and their clients as "initiables," all humanity now mingled under the dominion of Christian dogmas.

The transformations brought about by the introduction of these doctrines in society resulted in unity; the religious sentiment of union with one's fellow man had become a potent force in society. Man, strongly imbued with Christian sentiments, had a feeling of sympathy for his

fellow men. According to Ballanche, this humanitarianism remained for some time limited entirely to the domain of religion. When society came to realize that its survival and development depended upon a Christian basis, this sympathy for mankind became social humanitarianism. Charity had superseded solidarity. Charity, which is the necessary consequence of the introduction of Christian sentiments into the sphere of moral ideas combined with civil and political ideas, has the meaning of love for one's fellow man. Ballanche's ultimate concept of social Christianity has its basis in the idea of charity. Imbued with this Christian feeling, people now understand that they have a responsibility toward others in society. It is a conscious responsibility; it is the active and practical desire on the part of all people to aid the initiation of those who are unable to help themselves.

Not content with mere abstract theories, Ballanche sought to apply or demonstrate his concept of social Christianity. He insisted that there was a need for new, charitable institutions which would place society under the protection of these religious principles. Since social ills are caused by man's succumbing to a trial imposed upon him, these establishments must exemplify the sentiment of social humanitarianism for all mankind. In general terms, Ballanche suggested aid for the poor and sick. However, one social problem alone seemed to dominate his thoughts. This was the treatment of criminals. In *L'Homme sans nom* (1820) he asked that these people should not be excluded from human fraternity nor from the opportunity to better themselves by expiation. *La Ville des expiations* personified his ideal of a model community based upon his Christian social theory. Moral and social regeneration of humanity was the city's aim. Ballanche realized that his dreams could become a reality only in the future.

III. Ballanche and His Period

It is impossible to determine definitely that any member of the gatherings at the Abbaye-aux-Bois influenced Ballanche in any precise way. Neither Ballanche's works nor his correspondence indicate more than his general relations with the various people who came to Mme. Récamier's salon. Undoubtedly, however, the social, political, and literary discussions there must have at least helped Ballanche to formulate and clarify his views. Moreover, by comparing the development and application of his theory with the solutions offered by his acquaintances to similar problems, his relative significance becomes apparent.

As writers, both Ballanche and Chateaubriand were particularly interested in introducing religion into literature. The first work by Ballanche, *Du sentiment considéré dans ses rapports avec la littérature*

et les arts (1801), was a religious manifesto; he proclaimed the beauty and literary value of the Catholic religion. Becoming the expression of society, literature would eventually be found unable to reflect the new social life unless it had its inspiration in the force and beauty of Christian principles. Through Chateaubriand's *Le Génie du christianisme* the idea of the poetic beauties of religious subjects became popular.

In 1797 Chateaubriand wondered whether the future would merely increase irremediable social contradictions and whether Christianity should not henceforth relinquish its former pretensions of guiding modern societies. However, with his religious conversion, he claimed that society needed a religion and that that religion should be Christianity. Like Ballanche, whenever Chateaubriand spoke of the introduction of Christian principles into society, he referred to the practice of charity. His analysis of the numerous establishments created by charity reveals his sincere belief in the expiatory value of charitable deeds. However, he did not emphasize a future reward for all social Christians, as did Ballanche. Above all, he was socially conscious of the beneficial effect of Christian principles on man's political and social liberty.

Mme. de Staël, another of Ballanche's contemporaries, wrote in favor of a close relationship between literature and society. Instead of developing this idea, as did Ballanche, and insisting upon the establishment of Christian institutions in order to improve society, she merely stressed literature as the essential expression of society. She felt that one should study social institutions in order to understand better the literature of a particular period or country. She insisted that Christianity was the basis of modern western civilization. Essentially important as a theorist, Mme. de Staël, if she had no direct influence, at least stirred people such as Ballanche to examine new ideas. She made him more conscious that there was a need in France for insistence on Catholicism as the religious inspiration for literature and arts. Realizing that the word religion alone would not convey his meaning, Ballanche was quite explicit in defining religion. Although he stressed Catholicism, he did not preach against religious liberalism. In fact, he appreciated the essence of the liberal ideas expressed by Mme. de Staël and Constant. That is to say, he recognized the progressive force of Christianity. Successive interpretations of fixed Christian dogmas, he felt, led to a development of man's faculties and vice versa. Moreover, Christianity was a liberalizing religion because it gave man a sense of being able to compete socially with others. Religion could not be forced upon man; he had to choose it willingly, for only then would the feeling of Christian charitableness become a real part of him and of his actions.

The mutual interest in a social religion was the basis for Ballanche's

friendship with Lamennais. In his first works, Lamennais proceeded much as did Ballanche; he showed that society is the natural, necessary state for man and that religion is necessary to preserve society. Lamennais advocated the social necessity of religion, for he was thinking of the renovation of Catholicism when it would be permitted to exert its rightful influence in modern societies. The only authority which he recognized was that of the Pope, whom he considered as a safeguard against revolutionary individualism. With the alliance of social, political, and Catholic doctrines, he was sure a unity, characteristic of Christianity, would result. At first he was in favor of ultramontane Christianity, but gradually he became an advocate of liberal Catholicism. Since he could not ignore the problem of politics, his attitude toward the recognized religious authority kept changing. Finally, he claimed that he wanted to return to the spirit of primitive social Christianity and dispense with authority, which he had come to believe obscured the true meaning of Christianity. He was not advocating the separation of religious and civil society; the state of conditions in France merely led him to realize that the salvation of Christianity and subsequent social improvement depended upon freeing religion from enslaving ties. He was certain that the alliance of Christian and social principles would produce fraternity and social humanitarianism.

Lamennais was unquestionably the most important nineteenth-century writer to make Ballanche take a definite stand in relation to social and religious problems. Enthusiastically, Ballanche followed the Catholic movement of *L'Avenir,* a journal founded by Lamennais, in its efforts to bring religion closer to the people. He saw in Lamennais' attempts to reconcile the Church and liberty, the Pope and the people, a doctrine similar to his own. He was certain that Lamennais' apology of Christianity was in accord with the need of the times. Hence, he was upset when, August 15, 1832, the Pope condemmed the liberal and democratic doctrines of *L'Avenir.* When it became evident that Lamennais was renouncing his part in the ultramontane movement, Ballanche felt that the time to affirm his own position had arrived. Sincerely believing in the possibility of a reconstructed unity through Catholicism, he accepted the role abandoned by others. Although both men were striving to introduce the moral code of the Gospel into the social code of the people, Lamennais continued to stimulate the thought and actions of his contemporaries more directly than Ballanche.

The picture of Ballanche in relation to his personal and literary acquaintances shows him in general harmony with his period. Like many of his contemporaries, he sought an answer to existing social problems. Although no authentic testimony exists to verify his influence outside his intimate circle, the study of current social movements in respect to the

Lyon philosopher's doctrines adds more meaning to his concept of social Christianity.

Poland's struggle for independence, during the 1830's, is an example of a social-political problem under discussion in France. Each thinker or philosopher had his own opinions on the matter and Ballanche was no exception. The servitude of Poland seems to have been for him a symbol of the fate possible for Europe if all nations failed to turn to some basis for their societies, such as social Christianity. His ideas spread; the Polish writers Hoene Wronski, Mickiewicz, and Sigismond Krasinski adapted them to the circumstances of Poland. At least the writings of these Poles are an indication of the Lyon philosopher's relation to social problems of his period. His theory of the plebeian's continual struggle in society to achieve a social state based upon Christian charity had served as an inspiration for a country which desired the restoration of its independence.

Ballanche's social humanitarianism was in accord with that of his period. Victor Hugo, as a leader of nineteenth-century humanitarianism in France, presents various ideas which are similar to those of Ballanche. Socially and politically the question of the fate of all mankind had become significant. It was men such as Ballanche and Hugo who actively tried to guide the social development of humanity. Not only did they express general hatred for contemporary social miseries, but they sought to remedy them. Taking the part of the oppressed, they tried to arouse the sensibility of all society to these social ills, especially capital punishment. They are examples of men who, at this time, thought that the solution to existing problems lay in charity.

In spite of his liberal, democratic tendencies, Ballanche can not be considered in complete harmony with all social movements of his period. He differed essentially from a social organizer such as Saint-Simon. Ballanche was a traditionalist and a conciliator. Even though he was conscious of the progressive spirit of his nation and sought to adapt his ideas to it, he still firmly believed in the traditions, such as those of the monarchy and Catholicism. As far as he was concerned these two factors were alone capable of forming a society in which man could progress. Unlike the Lyon philosopher, Saint-Simon would substitute the growing scientific spirit for the traditions. He did not go as far as Auguste Comte, who made a veritable cult of science, but he predicted the development of a moral feeling based upon scientific progress. Ballanche, on the other hand, thought that the attainment of knowledge merely served to clarify the meaning of Christian principles which were often misinterpreted.

Ballanche's insistence upon Catholicism and traditional authority sets him apart from the social movements led by men such as Saint-Simon. In other respects, his position is similar to theirs. As a humanitarian, he

was interested in the fate of the common people and he advocated the religious sentiment of humanitarianism to improve their conditions. He realized, as did the other social writers, that no society could continue to exist without some means of unification. This means, for Ballanche, was to be religion, for it alone seemed capable of uniting men voluntarily.

Because of his contributions to thought and ideas concerning social progress, Ballanche merits attention among the social thinkers and philosophers of his period. Not without reason was he compared to Amphion and his lyre: "Cette lyre qui construit une cité montre ce que l'art pourrait entreprendre à notre époque de renouvellement social."[1]

[1] G. de Molènes, "Des dernières réceptions académiques," Revue des Deux Mondes, XXX (1842), 499.

VITA

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